

Earth-Friendly Gardening & Landscaping

The GreenMan



Planting a pizza & pasta garden

Pizza gardens have become all the rage in public display gardens across the country. That is not surprising when the inspiration comes from the 23 pounds of pizza each American man, woman, and child eats annually. Pizza gardens are a colorful extension of this obsession, promising a bounty of fresh, delicious toppings to would-be Wolfgang Pucks — while inspiring and fascinating budding young gardeners.

Pizza gardens can be planted to simply provide the fresh herbs and vegetables to make your home-baked pizza a masterful culinary creation, or they can be designed to create a whimsical round garden bed resembling a large deep dish pizza.

Public and school gardens looking to engage the attention of children generally follow the whimsical path. By appealing to kids using the food they love best, these gardens introduce a gratifying and hands-on awareness of seeds and germination, plant growth, soil, and general horticulture. It's pretty sneaky — and pretty effective.

To plan and lay out a typical pizza garden, begin by attaching a string to two garden stakes. The length of the string is the

radius (half the width) of the pie-shaped garden you want to create. A four to five foot length is ideal for a terrific mix of "toppings," while smaller spaces can follow the personal pan pizza route. Even a circular bed three feet across can provide tomatoes, peppers, onion, and a medley of herbs.

Begin by firmly inserting the stake in the center of the desired garden area, and use the second stake to scratch or otherwise outline the garden perimeter. Afterwards, you can define the outside of the bed with rocks, bricks, or wood mulch, depending on your taste in crust.

Most pizza gardeners prefer dividing the planting bed into equally-sized slices. The slices themselves can be defined with landscaping timbers or rocks, although a "softer" approach is to plant rows of parsley, basil, marjoram, garlic chives, spinach, scallions, oregano, bunching onions, arugula (for the truly daring), garlic, and even bright, edible flowers like nasturtium.

The larger inner spaces or slices can be planted with eggplant, sweet bell peppers, spicy-hot chili peppers, zucchini, plum tomatoes, such as La Roma or Prince Borghese for sauce, and medium-large tomatoes such as pink-



skinned Brandywine for slicing, or cherry varieties like Sungold or Yellow Pear for intense flavor when dried.

Admittedly, pepperoni shrubs are hard to locate at most nurseries, although mushroom lovers can grow their own portabella, crimini and white button toppings using mail-order mushroom kits.

With larger gardens, especially if children will be involved in maintenance and harvesting, it is often advisable to place stepping stones in each slice. Several local gardens feature round, reddish concrete pavers which represent pepperoni. Vegetarian pizza gardens can stick with round white pavers to represent mushrooms.

Another possibility would be to

create a pizza garden with one slice already removed; the gap would allow access for weeding and garden care and provide the planting bed with a unique focal point.

Keep in mind that a pizza garden is often best started in the fall, when it is more appropriate to plant garlic — and no pizza garden could be complete without garlic. Laying out the site, working the soil, and covering it with a layer of organic mulch will ensure that the planting area will be ready and eager to grow the following year.

For pesto pizza fans, remember that even pine nuts can be grown in your garden using the traditional Italian stone pine tree, or even the piñon pine grown in

western states, although you will have to wait a considerable number of years before harvesting.

Naturally, not every one will want a pizza garden dotting their landscape. All of the plants mentioned above can still be planted in traditional garden beds, and each will still provide the fresh toppings and rewarding taste that only comes from produce you grow yourself.

Of course, if you are not one of the people helping to eat the 100 acres of pizza consumed in the U.S. daily, your pizza garden could alternately supply the requisite toppings for crostini or focaccia, or even for a host of pasta sauces and Mediterranean-inspired salads. Buon appetito!

Top Picks for Your Gourmet Pizza & Pasta Garden

Vegetables

Beans

Cannellini (or Great Northern)
Roma (Romano style)

Tomatoes

Costoluto Genovese (slicing)
Sungold or Brandywine (slicing)
San Marzano (sauce)
La Roma Plum (sauce)
Prince Borghese (sauce)
Mariano (paste)
Napoli (canning)
Principe Borghese (drying)

Onions

Geneovese or Savona Cippolini
Yellow Cippolini
Italian Torpedo (long red)
White Scallion (bunching)

Arugula

Indigo Radicchio

Lucullus Chard
Zucchini Squash
Cucuzzi Gourd (summer squash)
Garlic

Siciliano (softneck)
Italian Easy Peel (hardneck)
California Early

Italian (Baby) Eggplant

Peppers
Pepperoncini or Tuscan (mild)
Corno di Toro (red or yellow)
Golden Marconi (sweet)
Purple or Red Marconi (sweet)
Italian Roaster (hot)

Chioggia Radish

Spinach
Imperial Star Artichoke
Escarole

Herbs

Basil

Sweet Broadleaf
Genovese
Purple Sweet
Piccolo or Globe (bush basil)
Oregano (Italian & Greek)
Sweet Marjoram
Rosemary
Hill Hardy
'Arp' (Winter Hardy)
Chives (Common/Onion & Garlic)
Bay Laurel (grow in pot)
Bronze & Green Fennel
Flatleaf (Italian) Parsley
Gigante d'Italia Parsley
Common Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)
Thyme (Common and Oregano)
Calendula (Pot Marigold)



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